"THE VOICES OF THE COMMON MAN IN THE WORKS OF KABIR DAS AND WILLIAM LANGLAND: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MEDIEVAL AGE"

SHORT SYNOPSIS

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by

Parul Bhateja
Registration number: 20/Ph.D/084

Under the supervision of
Dr. Swati Chauhan
Associate Professor, Department of English

FACULTY OF MEDIA STUDIES & HUMANITIES

MANAV RACHNA INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH & STUDIES

SECTOR-43, SURAJKUND –DELHI ROAD, FARIDABAD – 121001

FACULTY OF MEDIA STUDIES & HUMANITIES

Certificate

I hereby declare that the short synopsis "The Voices of the Common Man in the Works of Kabir Das and William Langland: A Critical Study of Medieval Age" is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English under the faculty of Media Studies & Humanities of Manav Rachna International Institute of Research & Studies, Faridabad during the academic year 2021-2022.

It is a bonafide record of original work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Swati Chauhan and has not been submitted in full or part to any other university or institute for a degree or diploma. Further, it is certified that the short synopsis is plagiarism-free and the proof has been submitted.

Parul Bhateja
20/Ph.D/084

25/8/22
Dr. Swati Chauhan
Associate Professor

(Chairman, DRC)
26.8.22

(Chairperson, CDP)

ABSTRACT

Literature is one of those strongest weapons which has been safeguarding the humanity as well as cultural heritage of a nation for ages. Innumerable literary figures of India as well as of foreign lands have strived hard to raise the voice of the common man through their works. Mystic poets Kabir Das and William Langland are known for their advocacy for the downtrodden. Kabir through his verses and Langland through his famed poem Piers the Plowman has showcased the struggle of a layman. The medieval age was the age characterized by social inequality, superstitions, fake rituals, etc. People were classified on the grounds of their caste, class, creed, or color. Untouchables were a community that faced the utmost opprobrium in medieval times. Kabir and Langland competently lambasted the then prevalent social evils and protected humanity to a greater extent. The focal point of their teachings was also to teach humans the goal of human birth. Their writings have benefitted society emotionally, religiously, culturally, and psychologically. This research work would scrutinize the commonality in the works of these two prolific writers and the teachings that they contributed to uplift the standards of the common man.

Keywords*: Universal Religion, Medieval Age, Social Inequality, Common Man, Humanity*

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Introduction

Literature is the mirror of life. Literature exists in two modes i.e., written as well as oral. It is evocative, artistic, permanent, and universal by nature. It is a phenomenon that has no expiry date or it never gets old and outdated. It is the most powerful tool to bring transformation to society. It brings a change in society as it is suggestive by nature. Epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana talk about the folktales of God. These epics keep us connected to our roots or religion. Essays and novels attack the social evils and bring a renaissance to society. On the other hand, poetry depicts the imagination of the poet and provides delight to its reader. These different genres of literature have divergent roles to perform. It is the literature of every nation that keeps on changing with the passage of time. One can have a glimpse of culture in the literature of that area.

Medieval India faced many ups and downs i.e., cultural, political, societal, etc. Many people were the prey of discrimination, facing humiliation publicly and not getting their basic rights. In England, soul power rested in the hands of monarchs and the church, always with the threat of rebellion. A large section of the population was peasants who could not exercise their fundamental rights. There was widespread inequality amongst the masses. They too had special rights. Artisans, merchants, and traders formed the third category of this classification. They were given due respect and privilege in society. The peasants were the last to come in this order. They were the least respected people in society and they had to pay huge taxes. Medieval saints and poets of India lit the flames of equality and self-love in the hearts of the people through their writings and teachings. To name a few Guru Nanak Dev ji, Ramananda, Kabir Das, Ramanuja, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mirabai, and Naamdev safeguarded the rights of the common man and advocated brotherhood and equality. Literary figures like Rabindranath Tagore, John Milton, Tulsidas, John Keats, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Virginia Woolf, Shashi Deshpande, and so on worked in varied genres of the literature and brought a change in the mindset of the people.

The medieval age in England is famous for the feudal system. Aristocrats, highest-ranking nobles, clergy, and kings were the people who invested soul power of the society. Peasants were a community that got the least number of advantages or fundamental rights. They had small houses of poor-quality accommodating livestock animals in it as compared to modern houses. Even the richest peasants were indulged in the service of aristocrats and they had to live away from their houses for a longer period of time to earn their daily bread. It was a community that had to pay huge taxes as well for better survival. The famed poem of Medieval England 'Piers the Plowman' composed by William Langland is a detailed account of the life journey of a common man. It portrays how a layman passes through a great struggle to earn his living. The poem sketches the characters of the elite section of the society including the Clergy, Aristocrats, etc. It throws light on the virtues a person must possess to lead a peaceful life. The poem is allegorical in tone.

Kabir Das

Kabir Das (1398- 1440) was the revolutionary and mystic poet of 15th-century medieval India. Although he was brought up by a Muslim couple, he never called himself a Muslim. He was an ardent supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity. He strongly raised his voice against the immorality of the medieval era i.e., casteism, fasting, animal sacrifice, discrimination, fake rituals, etc. He saved humanity by embracing the positive messages of Hinduism and Islam and created a universal religion that could be followed by a person of any religion. His writings include Bijak, Sakhi Granth, Adi Granth, and Anurag Sagar. He was broadly known for his couplets which touched upon almost all the spheres of human life. He was a believer of Nirguna Bhakti and never favored idol worship. According to him treating everyone equally with love is the ultimate devotion that can please God. He was the guardian of the common man and talked about them in his verses.

William Langland

The famed Medieval poet William Langland (1330- 1400) author of "Piers the Plowman," an allegorical poem that attacks abuse prevalent in the government of England and the Church and showcases the misery of the common man. Poem 'Piers the Plowman' is quite inspirational in tone and reflects many aspects that can influence one's life optimistically. The poem is allegorical in tone and majorly divided into three texts i.e., Text A, Text B, and Text C. The most

deeply edited version is Text B which extends Text A up to four thousand lines. This allegorical poem is based on the theme of dream visions in a row. The central character ‘Will’ has a series of dreams characterized by the vices and virtues of the Medieval age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ocean of Love: The Anurag Sagar of Kabir by Sant Bani Ashram Inc; First Edition (May 1, 1982)

The pious book, named The Ocean of Love also known as Anurag Sagar of Kabir is an enriching book with life-motivating verses composed by this legendary poet reformer. It is translated and edited under the guidance of Sant Ajaib Singh Ji. Noted elements of this book are inner peace, the role of karma, positive and negative vibes in a human, and the melodious hymns of God.

Saint Kabir: A Social and Religious Reformer by Dr. Rakhi S. Jain (2017)

The said research examines Kabir from the point of view of a social as well as a religious reformer. He was a strong opponent of fake rituals, idolatry, unhealthy customs, etc. He laid stress on finding God within oneself and not in the temples, mosques, etc. He advocated the value of being a humanist. He never found any difference between the names of Allah and Rama.

Saint Kabir: A Promotor of Universal Religion or Religion of Man by Dr. Paresh K. Jha (2017)

This paper puts Kabir in the category of one who strived hard to uplift the oppressed section of society. He not only attacked the social vices but also the demerits of human beings i.e., selfishness, jealousy, greed, etc. Kabir showed the entire humanity the path to achieving inner peace and eternity. He laid stress on brotherhood amongst the citizens and created a universal religion.

The Vision of Wisdom: Kabir Selected Sakhis by Chandan Sinha published by Rupa Publications, New Delhi (2020)

This book by Chandan Sinha contains the translated version of selected sakhis (couplets) of Kabir. Written in a very lucid language, the author has tried to maintain the originality and soul meaning of each Sakhi. Along with the English translation of the Sakhi, a brief explanation of the same is also given below which provides more clarity of the content.

Caste System in Medieval India by Srinivasa (2016)

This study gives a detailed account of the rigid caste system of India prevalent in the Middle Ages. It well portrays the hollowness and discrimination imposed on the common man due to the caste system.

English Society in the Later Middle Ages by Maurice Keen published by Penguin Group, USA. (1991)

This book consists of the explanation of three estates i.e., priests, knights, and laborers widespread in Medieval England. Discrimination against the peasant class is very well portrayed.

Piers the Plowman and Its Sequence contributed to the Cambridge History of English Literature by Manly John Matthews published by Palala Press. (2016)

Contains a detailed translation of three major sections of the allegorical poem Piers the Plowman. The lucid language of the book enables the reader to connect to the message that the poet was willing to convey to Medieval society.

Medieval People by Eileen Power published by Barnes & Noble, (1963)

A book with a detailed account of six unique sets of people of the Medieval age including two English merchants, a Frankish peasant; Marco Polo, Chaucer's Prioress, a middle-class Parisian housewife, a Venetian traveler; Madame Eglentyne.

History of English Literature by William J. Long published by Rupa Publications, (2015)

A noteworthy book with a detailed account of the history of English literature comprising all the ages from the Renaissance to the Modern Age. The book contains relevant authors of the said age including their major works. It also comprises the chronology of all the literary ages.

Chapterisation

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

The Medieval Age is an age that is characterized by numerous social and religious vices that chiefly affected the position of the common man. Although it created chaos around the globe there were literary figures who contributed to preserving the culture of said nation through their narratives. Saint Kabir opposed such vices of his era and promoted social harmony through his teachings. At the same time William Langland through his famed poem 'Piers the Plowman' portrayed the struggle of the common man.

CHAPTER II ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED VERSES OF KABIR DAS

The life of the famous saint-poet Kabir Das inspires us in many ways. Even though his parents were Muslims he never called himself a Muslim. He preached about humanity, equal rights of a being, salvation, role of karma rather than mere hymns sung in the praise of a particular deity. His verses form a large part of the holy book of Sikhs. He touched upon almost all the spheres of human life and displayed their relevance in his verses. He was an exceptional figure in Medieval India who safeguarded the rights of the common man to a greater extent.

CHAPTER III ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF WILLIAM LANGLAND

The renowned poem of 15th century Medieval England i.e., 'Piers the Plowman' composed by William Langland stands apart. Its allegorical tone successfully lashes upon the hypocrisy of the church and clergy and portrays the best possible solutions to deal with the same. Symbolism plays a significant role in mirroring the vices present and the struggle that a common man had to do in those times. The poem proposed a well-structured journey of human birth along with its goal.

CHAPTER IV COMPARATIVE STUDY

Langland's allegorical poem Piers the Plowman and Kabir's selected verses provide an overall understanding of the goal of human birth. Both of these prolific poets majorly attack social evils like corruption, selfishness, social hierarchy, idleness, blind rituals, hatred, superstitions, etc. The poem propounds the notion of labor, good deeds, and love. A critical study of the poem can work wonders in today's time of war and communal hatred. A comparison of the works of both poets would enrich us with a deeper understanding of life.

CHAPTER V- CONCLUSION

Researching the common features of the Medieval age of India and England will enable us to grasp the knowledge of both cultures. Scrutinizing the literary approach of Kabir and Langland would definitely enrich us with enormous knowledge of self-reliance and optimism. Their vision of viewing the homo sapiens with equality would enable us to treat everyone on the grounds of equality.

BROAD AREA OF RESEARCH

This study will explore the focal characteristics of Medieval society in the context of India as well as England. The struggle of the common man in the famed poem of William Langland 'Piers the Plowman' and in the couplets of Kabir Das will also be examined. This research work will also portray how these two eminent poets contributed to proving that humanity must be the religion that one should follow. It will be an out and out study of Kabir's selected couplets and Langland's Piers the Plowman along with the works of previously mentioned writers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this research study are as follows:

1. To estimate the dominant characteristics of the Medieval Age of India as well as of England.
2. To assess the struggle of the common man in the Medieval age in the backdrop of India and England.
3. To get acquainted with the strategies that Kabir propounded in his verses to heighten the standards of a layman.
4. To evaluate how 'Piers the Plowman' successfully traces the journey of a common man along with that of widespread inequality.
5. To examine the common reformative approach adopted by Kabir and Langland.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology that is inferred while carrying out this research work is mentioned below:

1. This research work comprises a qualitative perspective, that examines the challenges of the common man instigated by medieval society in Langland's and Kabir's verses.

2. Kabir's and Langland's original works will be studied as primary sources.

3. In-depth critical studies of other writers will also be done as secondary sources.

EXPECTED OUTCOME OF THE RESEARCH

1. This study will demonstrate the socio-cultural layout of the Medieval Age of India and England.
2. This research study would focus to provide an overview of the ignominy faced by the common man in the Medieval age.
3. It would also acknowledge the literary as well as moral attempts put by both of the poets to upgrade the standard of the common man.
4. This work is supposed to stimulate the notion of egalitarianism amongst the masses in times of contemporary war.
5. This research would measure the similarities in the efforts done by both the prolific poets to bring transformation to society.

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